THE SCARECROW

Stories for Children

BY YE SHENGTAO

The Scarecrow

A COLLECTION OF STORIES
FOR CHILDREN

By Ye Shengtao

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Illustrated by
HUANG YONGYU

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PREFACE

Thirty years ago I wrote a few dozen stories for children and those published here have been selected from among them. My intention was to call upon children to take an interest in real life and be attentive to things around them.

After "The Statue of the Ancient Hero" appeared in a Chinese reader a great number of teachers and students wrote to me about it, each holding a different view as to the moral of the story and asking whether their interpretation of it was correct. In my replies I could only tell them what I had in mind when I wrote it and that the moral would be divulged only at the end. The greatest significance in life for the stones of all sizes lay in forming a solid road for people to walk on. Before the road was built the hewing of the great rock into the statue of a hero and the use of the smaller stones for its base were of rather minor significance. When the big stone became proud after having been hewn into the statue of a hero, thought himself high and mighty and looked down upon the others, I only guessed at the "psychology" of that big

rock. And when I wrote about how the smaller stones felt about the big one's pride, I was also only venturing a guess at how they must have felt.

"The Language of Birds and Animals" was written at the time when Mussolini launched his war of aggression against Abyssinia. "The Experience of a Locomotive" was written during the Japanese imperialist invasion of China when the entire Chinese people had a strong desire to resist the Japanese but were prevented from doing so by the reactionary Kuomintang government. To point out this one fact is sufficient for our foreign readers and there is no need for further explanation.

It must be made particularly clear, however, that the actual conditions in China as related in my stories began to change on a nation-wide scale in 1949. The Chinese people, under the leadership of the great Communist Party of China, carried out a thoroughgoing revolution against the unreasonable old social system and took up the struggle against a ruthless nature. Though it has been only ten years since the task was begun, the face of China is already entirely changed.

If the thrush were flying now, he would certainly meet with many happy adventures wherever he went. There would be no end to his joyful praises. And if the scarecrow were standing in the fields now he would see large tracts of well-cared-for farmland, protected by rows of shelter belts and water flowing

in irrigation canals. None of these things could he have seen ten years ago. He would be surprised to see the great enthusiasm the peasants show for their work. How well they work together, smiles on their faces, their songs echoing above the clouds! Such things never happened ten years ago. He would also find it strange to see such sturdy crops and rich harvests. Are these the same as the crops that were planted ten years ago? The scarecrow would begin to feel sorry for himself in an entirely different way. He would reproach himself for being immobile like a tree rooted in the ground, unable to take so much as half a step, but for which he would have long since joined the peasants in their work.

The sensitive plant[1] would never have occasion to feel ashamed of itself for anything, because all that brought shame on it has vanished for ever. True, its leaves may still fold and droop as a bashful child lowers its head but this happens only when the children touch it out of curiosity, for the children like to see it act that way, and how can it disappoint them?

But changes have taken place not only in China; the whole world has moved on. Where is Mussolini today? The whole continent of Africa, like a giant awakened from a deep sleep, has stood up proudly and stretched out its arms to the rising sun. True, there are still men of Mussolini's ilk in the world. Sometimes we

[1] Called in China *han xiu cao* or "shy grass."

say, "Here is a second Mussolini" and "There's a third." But they can never run amuck as did Mussolini himself because they are closely watched by giants standing guard on every continent. Besides, these Mussolini men might not relish the thought of a public hanging in Milan.

Thus, almost all the stories in this volume deal with events of the past. This is just right! Isn't it the custom to begin children's stories and fables with "Once upon a time . . ."?

Ye Shengtao

May 1959

The Seed

Once upon a time, there was a seed. It was as big as a walnut with a lovely green skin. No one who saw it could help admiring it. It was said that if planted, it would put forth a jade-green shoot, and of course its flower would be even more beautiful. No rose, peony or chrysanthemum could compare with it. No orchid, cassia or plantain-lily would be able to match its fragrance. No one had ever planted this seed, however, so that no one had ever seen its beautiful flower or smelt its fragrance.

When the king heard of this seed, he laughed for joy. A snowy white beard covered his mouth like a thicket but now it parted — he could not shut his mouth for laughing. He said: "In my garden, there are all kinds of flowers. The small white ones that grew under ice and snow in the north have been transplanted here by my special envoy, and lotus flowers as big as plates from the tropical south have been presented to me as tribute by the people. But all these are ordinary flowers. Other people have them too. So

what's special about them? Now this seed is the only one of its kind. When it sprouts and blossoms, there won't be a second plant like it in the whole world. That'll show how much nobler and more powerful I am than anybody else. Ha, ha, ha. . . ."

So the king sent men to fetch the seed and they planted it in a white jade pot. Soil from the royal garden was sifted again and again for fear it wasn't fine enough. Water from a golden jar was filtered again and again for fear it wasn't clean enough. Every morning, the king himself would carry the pot out from the greenhouse to the porch steps in front of the palace and carry it back to the greenhouse at night. When it became cold, a stove was installed to keep the seed warm.

Even in his dreams, let alone when he was awake, the king longed to see the jade-green shoot grow in the pot. He sat beside it waiting, all the time. But there was no sign of any jade-green shoot. There was only the white jade pot filled with greyish black mud.

Time slipped by and two years passed in the twinkling of an eye. In spring when the grass sprouted, the king prayed to the seed: "The grass has sprouted. May you soon follow suit!" In the autumn, when the second batch of seeds came up, the king again prayed to the seed: "The second batch of seeds have come up, you should follow suit!" But all this was of no avail. So the king became angry. He said: "This is a dead

seed, an ugly, stinking thing. What do I want it for?" He dug the seed up from the mud. It was just the same as before, big as a walnut with a glossy green coat. The more he looked at it, the angrier he grew. So he threw it with all his might into the pond.

From the king's pond the seed drifted into a small stream that ran through the countryside. A fisherman fishing there caught it in his net. Since it was such an unusual seed, he went round offering it for sale.

A rich man heard about it and smiled so gleefully that his eyes nearly disappeared in folds of his fat face which was just like a round rubber ball. He said: "In my house, I have treasures of every kind, diamonds as big as eggs, pearls as big as walnuts. I paid high prices for them, but what do they amount to? I am not the only one who has such things. Besides, it really is a bit vulgar to talk about gold, silver and pearls all the time. Now here is this seed — the only one of its kind! When it blossoms, it will show my cultivated taste and I shall outshine all the other rich men in the world. Ha, ha, ha. . . ."

So the rich man bought the seed from the fisherman and planted it in a platinum jar. He hired four noted gardeners to do nothing but look after it. These four gardeners were selected from more than three hundred. Very difficult questions concerning all the secrets of growing rare flowers were asked in their examination. They all answered well and to the point. Having been

engaged, they were paid very high wages, and even given allowances to make suitable arrangements for their families so that they could devote their whole attention to their work. These four men did their best. They watched the platinum jar by turn without leaving it for one minute or even one second. They saw that the very best earth and the very best fertilizers were used. They watered the seed and sunned it daily. In short, they did everything they could.

The rich man thought: "Since the seed is so well tended, it'll certainly sprout and blossom quickly. When it blossoms, I'll give a big banquet, invite all the rich men of my own rank and let them see my beautiful rare flower which cannot be matched in the whole world. They will admit that I'm the richest and that I outshine them all." The thought of this made him more and more impatient. Time and again he went to the platinum jar to look, but there was no sign of any jade-green shoot. There was only the platinum jar filled with greyish black mud.

Time slipped by and two more years passed in the twinkling of an eye. In spring, when the time for giving banquets approached, he prayed to the seed: "I shall soon be giving a banquet. Please help me, by shooting up and blossoming quickly!" In autumn, when once more the time for banquets was drawing near, he again prayed to the seed: "I shall be giving another banquet. Please help me, by shooting up and

blossoming quickly!" But all this was of no avail. So he became angry and said: "This is a dead seed, an ugly, stinking thing. What do I want it for?" He dug the seed up from the mud. It was just the same as before, big as a walnut with a glossy green coat. The more he looked at it, the angrier he grew. So he threw it with all his might over the wall.

The seed fell at the door of a shop. The shopkeeper picked it up. Greatly delighted, he thought: "A rare seed has just dropped by my door. This is a sure sign that I'll soon be rich." He planted the seed by his shop and longed for it to sprout and blossom. Every day when he opened the shop he would go and take a look, and when he closed up at night he would go once again. A year soon passed. But no jade-green shoot appeared. The shopkeeper became angry and said: "I'm a fool to think this is something rare! It is only a dead seed, an ugly, stinking thing. Now I know this, I shan't waste my time on such a foolish thing." He dug the seed up and threw it into the street.

The seed lay in the street for half a day and then a street cleaner swept it into his garbage cart with the dirt and dumped it near an army camp. A soldier who picked it up said happily: "A rare seed has come my way, I'll surely be promoted." So he planted the seed by the camp, longing to see it sprout and blossom. After drill he would squat watching by its side with his

short rifle in his arms. When the other soldiers asked him what he was doing there, he wouldn't tell them.

More than a year passed and still there was no sign of the jade-green shoot. The soldier became angry and said: "I'm a fool to think this is something rare! It is just a dead seed, an ugly, stinking thing. Now I know this, I shan't waste my time on such a foolish thing." He dug the seed up and threw it with all his strength as far as he could.

The seed flew as if it were an aeroplane. It flew and flew till finally it dropped into a green wheat field.

There was a young peasant working in the wheat field, his skin like burnished copper. Muscles stood out on his arms; he was like a sculptured giant. After loosening the earth in the field with his hoe for a while, he raised his head to look round, and a peaceful smile played round his lips.

The peasant saw the seed fall and exclaimed: "Ha, what a lovely seed! Let me plant it." So he dug a hole with the hoe and buried the seed.

He worked as usual, tilling when it was time to till, hoeing when it was time to hoe and watering when it was time to water. Naturally the place where the seed was planted was tilled, hoed and watered — just like the rest of the field.

Not many days later, a green shoot, as thick as his little finger, grew from where the seed was planted. A few days more passed. Its stem and branches grew so

fast that it looked like a small tree, carved from green jade, standing in the field. On its tip a bud appeared: At first it was as big as a walnut, then it grew and grew, till it was the size of a tangerine, an apple, a grape-fruit and finally a water melon. Then it blossomed. The petals were red, layer upon layer of them, while inside there was a mass of golden yellow stamens. A strange rich fragrance spread from the flower. This fragrance clung to all who came near and never vanished.

The young peasant worked as usual, going to and fro in the field. When he passed this rare flower, he would stop for a while to look at it and a happy peaceful smile would play round his lips.

All the villagers came to see this wonderful flower. When they returned home, their faces were wreathed in smiles and the sweet perfume was everywhere.

1921

The Thrush

Once there was a thrush who lived in a golden cage. The bright sun shone upon the wires of the cage, making it glisten as brilliantly as the king's palace. The water cup was made of green jade, which, imparting its colour to the water inside, made it look like a lotus pond after a rain. The food bowl was made of chestnut-coloured agate. Three ivory perches were fixed in the cage for the thrush to stand upon. At night the cage was covered with a piece of the finest satin.

The thrush's feathers were glossy and smooth, not a single one was missing or dishevelled. He was given the very best food to eat and bathed twice a day. He felt very comfortable and each time after he had been fed and washed, he would skip about in the cage. When he was tired he would stand on one of the ivory perches to rest. Then he would preen his feathers one after another with his beak, straighten his body, flap his wings and after casting a swift look around, hop back and forth again.

The sound of his singing was soft and sweet; those who heard it were enchanted and intoxicated by the melody. He was kept by a rich man's son who loved him very dearly. The boy fetched the bird's drinking water from a mountain spring every day and it was carefully filtered. The grains of millet the thrush ate were carefully selected; each one had to be full and round; and they were well washed. Why did the owner of the bird take so much trouble? Why did he use such an expensive cage for the thrush? It was because he liked to hear thrushes sing, and the singing of a thrush gave him such joy as he thought he could not get from anything else.

The thrush, aware that his owner treated him well and liked to hear him sing, tried to sing as much as possible. Even when he was tired he still sang, although he did not understand what was so good about his singing. He did not know why his owner should have such a taste. He just knew that his owner really loved to hear him sing, so he sang for him. The boy often said to his playmates, brothers and sisters: "My thrush is wonderful; he sings beautifully. Come and hear him." They came along to watch and listen and lavished praises on the thrush. The thrush thought: "I really can't understand what's so nice about my chirping, that they love so much to hear? However, since they have been invited by my owner, if I don't enter-

tain them well he will be disappointed." So he sang with all his might.

Day after day passed. Life went on as usual and everything was fine. The thrush kept on singing for his owner, for his brothers and sisters. However, he could never understand what was so interesting about his singing.

The thrush was perplexed and anxious to find out the reason for his owner's strange taste. One day after his owner had put food and water into the cage he forgot to close the door when he left. The thrush hopped to the cage door, looked around, went out of the cage, and flew up to the roof of the house. He glanced around. It was all so strange and beautiful. Clouds like white sails floated in the blue sky. Green willow branches waved to and fro. In someone's courtyard apricot trees were in full bloom. Far away there was a mountain which, shrouded in light mist, looked like a picture seen through sleepy eyes. The more the thrush saw the happier he was. He skipped about and then stopped to take a long look round.

His heart soared; he forgot about the cage and his life there. In his excitement, he flew off without thinking where he was going. He flew past a green pasture, a wide expanse of sandy wilderness, the Yangtze with its roaring waves, and the muddy, turbulent Yellow River. Then he thought of taking a rest. He fluttered his wings, flew down and alighted on a gate tower on

the wall of a big city. He watched many pedestrians, carts and horses passing below in the streets.

It was a strange scene that he saw. From afar came a man half reclining on a wooden seat with a wheel on each side while another man pulled him along, running like mad. He was not the only one doing this, for as soon as the puller and his load passed by, a long string of others doing the same thing came along. The thrush thought: "Those who recline on the wooden seats probably have no legs. Otherwise, why do they not walk but have to be carried along by other people?" He took a careful look at one of the men who was being pulled along. The lower part of his body was covered by a fine woollen blanket, from under which protruded two feet in shining, fashionable black shoes. "So he does have legs," thought the thrush. "Then why does he have to be carried by another man? If this is the way things are done, there will be fifty useless persons among a hundred?" He thought the matter over many times but still could not understand it.

"Probably those who do the pulling think it very interesting." But when he took a careful look at them, it did not seem so. Sweat streamed down their red faces, while their backs were so hot that one could almost feel their heat. They leaned forward as they ran with big strides like ostriches fleeing for their lives. Before one foot touched the ground the

other one was already lifted. "Why are they in such a hurry? Where are they going?" The thrush could not make it out. Then he saw a man on the seat pointing to the left with his hand. The man running in front at once slowed up and turned the wheels, the seat and the man reclining on it all to the left, and went dashing down the road that way. Then the thrush understood. "Those people running like mad are sweating for the benefit of others. That's why they have no smiles on their faces and don't sing songs of delight. There is no pleasure in their work and they take no interest in it."

It grieved him to see that a man should have to work as another man's legs. He began to sing in sad tones. In his songs he expressed his sympathy for those unfortunate people who drudged for others and whose work was meaningless and of no interest to them.

He could no longer bear to see them and wanted to go somewhere to have a little rest. So he flew up to the green-painted balcony of a high building. The balcony was in front of a big room through the window of which many rich people could be seen around a table eating. The table-cloth was as white as snow. The knives, forks, wine glasses and coloured china plates and dishes all shone brightly. A big vase stood in the middle full of flowers of different colours. The faces of the people around the table were red and shining, their eyes half-closed, evidently

in appreciation of the wine they tasted. Suddenly he heard a noise below. The thrush looked down and saw a completely different scene. On an oblong wooden board, beside a knife, there lay a fish with neither head nor tail, a small heap of shredded meat, several shelled lobsters and some chickens and ducks roughly cut into pieces. Beside the board stood a water tank and a slop-pail; plates, bowls, dishes, spoons, bottles of different sizes, coal, and firewood were scattered in many places on the floor. There were several men in the room, naked to the waist and spattered with oil, busily working at various jobs amid thick smoke and steam. The man at the stove was frying something in a pan. No sooner was oil put into the pan than flames shot up on all sides, and the man's face and arms became red from the heat. When the food was cooked, it was put on a coloured china plate and a man dressed in white took it upstairs. After a while, laughter from upstairs was heard, and the people around the table were busy again with their knives and forks.

The thrush thought: "Those people downstairs are probably not feeling well; otherwise, why do they stay by the fire all the time? They stand there working busily; maybe it's because they find the work meaningful and interesting?" He looked at them carefully and concluded that he was wrong. "If they've caught cold, why don't they stay in bed at home? If they find their work meaningful and interesting why is there no

look of joy on their faces? Why don't they eat the food they've cooked themselves? Evidently they are taking orders from the man dressed in white and have to do this and that as they are told. That's why they frown. They work busily not because they want to do it but because other people want to eat."

It grieved him to see that any man had to become a machine for making food for others and he began to sing dejectedly. In his songs he expressed his sympathy for those unfortunate people who drudged for others and whose work was meaningless and of no interest to them.

He could no longer bear to see them and wished to go somewhere for a rest. So he spread his wings and flew over a winding lane. In the quiet he heard a girl singing to the soft tune of a *san-hsien* (Chinese banjo). He came down and landed on the roof. There was a skylight in the roof through which he saw a tall, dark-faced man sitting on a chair and playing a *san-hsien,* while a girl of thirteen or fourteen stood by singing. "Now I've found people who are happy," he thought. "They are playing music and singing. Of course they are music-lovers. I'd like to see how they enjoy themselves." As he listened he watched them carefully.

Unfortunately it was not as he expected. Again he was wrong. The girl strained her throat as her voice rose higher and higher. When she reached the highest note her face was red, her eyebrows were tightly

drawn, and the blue veins above her eyebrows stood out; her chest heaved up and down and she was out of breath. After a while the music gradually slowed down, the words of the song, which were many, continued to roll out from her mouth like flowing water, and she hardly had time to take a breath. Her voice became hoarse. The music and singing stopped. The tall, dark-faced man knitted his eyebrows and stared at her, saying: "How can we ever ask people for money when you sing like that. Sing it again!" Lowering her head, her eyes filled with tears, the girl sang again to the music of the *san-hsien.* This time she seemed to sing with great care and her voice was tremulous.

Then the thrush began to understand. "After all she too sings for others. If she could do whatever she wanted she would have stayed in her room to rest. But she cannot do that because other people want to be amused. In order to earn money she must take great pains to practise her singing. The one who plays the *san-hsien* also does it for others, and he forces the girl to sing for the same purpose. What does it all mean? They have never thought about it even in their dreams."

Feeling sorry for those who were other people's musical instruments, the thrush sang with sadness. In his songs he expressed his sympathy for those unfortunate people who laboured for others and whose work was meaningless and uninteresting to them.

The thrush decided not to go back to his cage for though it was as gorgeous as a palace he did not want to live in it again. After he had seen so many unfortunate people he realized that his own life had been very miserable. His singing was meaningless, uninteresting and really unnecessary. Why should he sing for his owner and his owner's brothers and sisters? Being muddle-headed he used to think that a life like his was not bad! But now, the more he thought of those unfortunate people he had seen, the more miserable he felt. He could not help weeping. His tears rolled down, till he wailed, making plaintive sound like a cuckoo.

He flew off towards the wilderness and into vast and boundless spaces. At night, he slept among the trees. During the day he flew and sang whenever he felt like it. When hungry, he would find some wild fruits to eat. When dirty, he would bathe in a stream. He was no longer confined in a cage. He could do whatever he liked. Sometimes when he saw unfortunate things happen and felt sad he would sing his sadness away. Strange to say, when he sang he felt much better, his depression disappeared at once like the morning mist. If he did not sing he would feel stifled. From then on, he knew that to sing was meaningful and interesting.

There were terrible things happening everywhere in the world — in the cities, fields, small huts and big mansions. Whenever the thrush saw them he felt unhappy

and sang sadly. He sang for himself, for all the unhappy people and things which merited attention. He never sang again for the pleasure of one man or a handful of men.

As the thrush sang his voice rose to the clouds and was carried far and wide by the breeze. When factory workers, peasants in the fields, women weavers, ricksha-pullers, old cows, skinny horses, carrier pigeons, and other creatures heard him, they all felt relieved and consoled, forgetting their fatigue and sorrow. Looking up and smiling they would say: "The thrush is really lovely, his voice is so sweet!"

1922

The Scarecrow

The countryside and what happens in the fields by day have been described by poets in beautiful poems and painted by artists in fine paintings. At night after drinking, poets become a little tipsy while artists sing in low voices, their exquisite musical instruments in their arms. None of them have time to go to the fields then. Is there anybody who can tell what the fields are like and what happens there at night? Yes, there is the scarecrow.

This scarecrow is made by the peasants. His frame is made of fine sticks of bamboo taken from the bamboo grove, his muscles and skin of last year's yellow straw. A broken bamboo basket or a lotus leaf serves as his hat, and his face underneath is so flat that the nose and eyes can hardly be distinguished. His fingerless hand holds a broken fan — to say "hold" is really incorrect because the fan simply dangles in the air from a piece of thread tied to his hand. His spine is very long, the lower part reaching down below his feet and buried by the peasants in the soil. He goes on standing like this all day and all night.

The scarecrow has a strong sense of responsibility. He is not nearly so lazy as the cow which often lies down on the ground and looks up at the sky. Nor is he as mischievous as the dog which keeps running about so that his master has to look for him all over the place. Unlike the cow, the scarecrow never lies on the ground to look up at the sky, neither does he play or run about like the dog. Quietly he watches over the fields, gently waving the fan in his hand to drive away the little birds that come to peck at the ears of newly grown rice. He never eats or sleeps. He doesn't even sit down to have a rest but always stands there very straight.

Naturally the scarecrow is the only one who knows exactly what the fields look like and what happens in them during the night. He knows how the dew sprinkles the leaves and how sweet it tastes. He sees the stars twinkle and the moon smile. He knows the quietness of the fields when the flowers and trees are sound asleep at night; he knows how the insects search for each other and the butterflies make love. In short, he knows exactly all that happens during the night.

Here are some things the scarecrow saw at night.

One night when the sky was full of stars, he kept watch over the fields slowly shaking the fan in his hand. Then new ears of rice rustled against each other, glimmering in the starlight like bubbles of water. When a breeze sprang up, their stalks seemed to whisper. The scarecrow rejoiced at the sight. He was sure

that this year's harvest would bring a smile to the face of his poor old mistress. He had never seen her smile. Her husband had died eight or nine years before. Whenever she thought of it, she would burst into tears and her eyes were always red. She had only one son and it had taken him and his mother three whole years of hard work in the fields to pay off her husband's burial expenses. But soon afterwards her son had fallen ill with diphtheria and never recovered. She had fainted away when he died and ever since her heart had troubled her. Old and weak as she was, she had to plough the fields all alone. After another three years she managed to pay back the money borrowed for her son's burial. But then for two successive years there were floods and the crops in her fields were spoiled. She shed so many tears that her eyesight suffered, and now she could no longer see clearly. Her face was wrinkled like dried orange peel — how could she smile? But this year, the paddy was growing vigorously and there had not been too much rain. A promising harvest was in store. The scarecrow was happy for the old woman's sake. At harvest time, when she saw the plump ears of rice and knew that all her efforts had not been in vain, the wrinkles on her face would surely smooth out and she would smile with satisfaction. If she did really smile like that, it would be more precious to the scarecrow than the smile of the stars or the moon because he loved his old mistress.

While he was deep in thought, a little yellowish white moth flew over. He recognized it at once as an enemy of the paddy and so an enemy of his mistress too. Both as his duty and because of his love for his mistress, he wanted to drive that little moth away at once. He began to move the fan in his hand. But the breeze was so light that he could not frighten the moth away. It left its perch and alighted on another rice stalk, quite unconscious of the scarecrow's efforts. Seeing this, he became very worried. But like a tree rooted to the ground, he was unable to move a step. No matter how he fanned, the little moth stayed on the rice stalk. As the scarecrow thought of the ruined harvest, the tears, sunken cheeks and misery of his mistress, his heart seemed to be pierced by a knife. The moth, however, remained there in spite of all his fanning.

Not until the stars had disappeared and night had vanished did the little moth fly away. With a heavy heart the scarecrow cast a look at the rice stalk. Yes, there was a crack in the middle of the stalk and the green leaves above were drooping and wilting. What a pitiful sight! Another look showed that the moth had laid many eggs on the back of the leaves. The scarecrow became afraid. The more he thought, the more he feared disaster was inevitable. His sorrow-stricken mistress could not see clearly; he must help her to discover this as soon as possible and save the crop while there was time. In his desperation, he waved

his fan faster. Often it knocked against him with a bang; but since he could not speak, this was the only way he could try to warn his mistress.

The old woman came to the fields. Stooping, she made sure that there was enough water in the field and she need not pump more from the river. She looked at the rice she had planted. It seemed very strong. She touched the ears; they were fat and heavy. Then she cast a glance at the scarecrow whose hat was still properly set and whose fan was still waving back and forth and banging against him. He was standing as straight as ever in the same position, looking just as usual. When she saw everything was all right, she started home down the path, to go on twisting straw rope.

The scarecrow grew frantic when he saw her leave. He flapped his fan hard, hoping to hold her back. He meant to say: "Mistress, don't go away! Don't be so sure that all is well in the field. The seeds of disaster have been sown. When they start to grow, you will be helpless, your tears will run dry and your heart will break. You must do something now to destroy these pests before it is too late. Here, look at this stalk, look at the back of the leaves!" Repeatedly he rapped out this warning with the fan, but the old woman did not understand and walked slowly away. In his anxiety the scarecrow fanned harder than ever until his mistress

was out of sight. Then he realized that all his warnings were of no avail.

No one except the scarecrow was worried about the grain. If only he could jump up to destroy the moth's eggs! If only he could ask the wind to take a message to his mistress and bring her back to prevent disaster! Weak and flimsy as he was and laden with grief, he could hardly hold himself straight. With his shoulders slanting forward and his back bent, he looked like a sick man.

Within a few days yellowish white grubs had spread all over the fields. Late at night when all was quiet, the scarecrow heard them sucking the juice from the rice stalks and saw them climbing from one to another. Gradually the ears of rice hung down listlessly and the leaves became withered and yellow. He could hardly bear the sight; and the thought that his mistress' hard work would earn her nothing but tears and sighs made him lower his head and weep.

At this time of year, the weather was becoming colder, especially in the open fields at night. The scarecrow shivered in the wind but he was weeping so much that he hardly felt it. Suddenly he heard a woman's voice: "I wondered who it could be, but it's just you after all." He started and was only then aware of the cold. But what could he do? For duty's sake and because he was unable to move freely, he had to stand still. The voice was that of a fisherwoman whose boat was anchored

by the side of the river, which ran past the fields. There was a dim light showing from the cabin. The woman cast her net into the river, then seated herself on the bank to wait for a while before drawing it in.

A child's cough could be heard now and then in the cabin and a weak voice kept calling "Mama!" This made the woman uneasy. Though she hauled in the net with all her might, it seemed that something was wrong, for almost every time the net was empty. The voice in the cabin could still be heard. She called out to her sick child: "Go to sleep now! If I get a fish, I'll be able to make some gruel for you tomorrow. Don't disturb me by calling out all the time. How shall I ever be able to catch any fish?"

"Mama, I'm so thirsty," cried the child, unable to control himself. "Give me some tea!" Another burst of coughing followed.

"Where can I get tea for you? Now behave yourself a while, will you?"

"I'm so thirsty!" The child started sobbing. His sobs sounded heart-rending in the open fields at night.

Reluctantly the fisherwoman laid down the net and went back to her boat. She entered the cabin, picked up a bowl, scooped up some water from the river and gave it to her ailing child. He was so thirsty that he drank it at once, but as soon as he put down the bowl his cough became worse than ever. After a while, he lay panting.

The fisherwoman did not stay long with her child, for she had to go ashore to tend the net. Much, much later, when the cabin was still, after many unsuccessful casts she finally caught a silver carp seven or eight inches long. This was her first catch. Carefully taking the fish from the net, she put it into a wooden pail before casting the net again. The wooden pail stood right by the scarecrow's feet.

The scarecrow was in great distress. He pitied the thirsty child who could not have even a mouthful of tea, and sick as he was, could not have his mother stay by his side. He pitied the unhappy fisherwoman too, because for the sake of a bowl of gruel the next day she had to neglect her sick child on such a cold night. If only he could serve as firewood to make tea for the child! If only he could turn into a mattress to give the child some warmth! If only he had been able to keep the grubs from the paddy he would now have had some rice to make gruel for the fisherwoman! If he could walk, he would promptly have done what he wished, but unluckily he was rooted to the ground like a tree unable to move a step. There was nothing he could do. The more he thought of it, the worse he felt. He cried even more bitterly. A sudden bang frightened him and made him stop crying to see what was the matter. It was the silver carp being thrown into the wooden pail.

There was very little water in the pail so that only the silver carp's underside was wet. The unhappy fish

tried hard to get away, jumping with all its might. It tried several times but always fell back bruised and aching to the bottom of the pail. When the eye which was uppermost caught sight of the scarecrow, it begged: "Do put down your fan for a while, friend, and save me! Away from my home in the water, I shall die. Be kind, friend, and save me!"

The scarecrow was very touched by the silver carp's earnest entreaties but he could only shake his head as if to say: "Please forgive me, I'm weak and helpless! I'd like nothing better than to rescue you, and not only you but the woman who caught you, her child and all the others. But I am rooted to the ground like a tree unable to move a step. I can't do as I'd like. Please excuse me, I'm weak and helpless!"

The fish failed to understand what the scarecrow meant. Seeing him shake his head, it flared up like a fire. "It isn't difficult!" it cried. "How heartless you are, just shaking your head like that. Well, I was a fool to ask anyone else to help me out of my trouble. I must try to help myself. If I can't, I'll die. That's nothing!" Saying this, it jumped again with all its might so that even its tail and fins stiffened with the effort.

Realizing that the silver carp had misunderstood him and knowing that he had no better way of explaining things, the scarecrow sighed and sobbed in deep distress. After a while, he raised his head to look around. The fisherwoman had fallen asleep with one hand still

holding the net. She must have been too tired to keep awake although she was still worried about the next day's gruel. And what of the fish in the pail? It had stopped jumping though its tail was still lashing intermittently. The scarecrow thought over all the sad things that had happened that night. What a tragic night it had been! The yellow grubs were very happy, however. After they had eaten their fill, they danced on the tips of the leaves. The crop was ruined and the feeble efforts of his mistress had come to nothing. Could anything in the world be more pathetic?

The night became darker and the stars grew dim. Suddenly the scarecrow saw a dark figure steal along the footpath. When it came near, he looked carefully and saw it was a woman in a short loose jacket. Her hair was dishevelled. She stopped a while to look at the fishing boat by the river bank and then turned, making her way towards the river too. After a few paces, she halted again. The scarecrow was very curious and watched her carefully.

The woman muttered to herself now and then in a faint, sorrowful voice audible only to the scarecrow, who was familiar with all the small sounds of the night. She said: "I'm not a cow or a pig that you can sell as you please! I must run away before you can sell me tomorrow. When you get a little money you waste it on gambling or drinking. That's all you care about. Why have you driven me to this? . . . Death is the only way

out for me now! When I am dead, I'll look for my child in the other world." What terrible things she was saying! She lamented, her voice choked with sobs.

The scarecrow shuddered over this fresh tragedy. She was going to take her own life! The impulse to save her nearly drove him frantic. Again he waved his fan, hoping to arouse the sleeping fisherwoman. But in vain, she was sleeping like the dead and did not stir. He hated himself for being rooted to the ground like a tree, unable to move a step. Surely it was a sin not to save the woman from death. This sin of his hurt him more than dying himself. "Let the day break quickly! Let the peasants get up quickly! Let the birds fly quickly to spread the alarm! Let the wind blow away her desire for death!" As he breathed this silent prayer, all around was dark and not a sound could be heard. Heart-broken, he dreaded to look yet could not tear his eyes away from the dark figure standing by the river.

The woman stood in silence for a while, swaying back and forth several times. The scarecrow feared the terrible moment had come. He flapped the fan louder. Instead of jumping she straightened herself up.

A short while passed. Then all of a sudden she raised her arms and plunged into the river. The scarecrow lost consciousness even before he heard the splash as she fell into the water.

The next morning when the peasants went to the river bank, they found the woman's dead body in the river. The news soon spread. Men and women in the neighbourhood rushed to the scene. The noise awakened the sleeping fisherwoman. She looked at the fish, which was already dead and stiff. Then she picked up the wooden pail and went into the cabin. Her sick child was awake, his face thinner and his coughing more frequent. The old peasant woman also came to the riverside on the heels of the others. She looked at her own paddy field in passing. No one had warned her that all the stalks had been bored by grubs in the last few days. The unripe ears of rice were drooping limply while the fresh green leaves had turned yellow. In her despair, she stamped her feet, beat her chest and wept aloud. As the others hurried over to comfort her, they noticed that the scarecrow had fallen flat on his face in the devastated field.

1922

The Statue of the Ancient Hero

To commemorate a hero of ancient times a sculptor was asked to make a statue.

The sculptor accepted the commission and began to read everything that dealt with this hero, to form an idea of what he looked like and what sort of character and disposition he had. He thought it would be better to make no statue at all than to make one offhand. He must produce a living likeness, so that all those who saw the statue might have a better knowledge and understanding of the hero and so have a greater respect for him.

Success comes to those who work hard. By studying books and drawing on his imagination, the sculptor was finally able to form an image of the statue in his mind. He had a clear idea of what form and expression it should have; he mapped out all the details down to its fingers and hair. It was his belief that only by turning the idea he had formed into reality could he make the statue a real living image of the hero and not just a lifeless piece of stone.

The sculptor went up a mountain, brought back a big block of stone, and then began to work. He had already a model in his mind, and as he looked at the stone he knew just which part should be left and which chipped away. As he worked busily with chisel and knife, chips of stone, big and small, fell to the ground. Like the stars at dusk, dimly seen at first but gradually becoming clear, the statue of the hero finally stood before the sculptor, exactly like the image which he had formed in his mind.

The hero's head, tilted back, and his eyes, gazing into the distance, expressed strong will and far-reaching vision. His mouth was open as if he were shouting; his left arm was held up with the elbow turning inward as if he were trying to embrace the masses below. His clenched right hand pointed forward; the muscles on the right arm stood out like knots on the trunk of an old tree. He seemed to be ready to knock down any enemy who dared to do him the slightest harm.

There was a square in the middle of the town, and the people set this new statue in the middle of it. Stone chips were used for the base — the various sized chips that the sculptor had chiselled off when he was making the statue. This was a new form of artistic structure, which the sculptor claimed was much better than using one square block of stone as a pedestal. It stood unusually high. The statue was the first thing one saw when ap-

proaching the city, just as the first thing one sees when one arrives in Paris is the Eiffel Tower.

After this the sculptor became famous. He had succeeded in making a statue of an ancient hero which satisfied everybody.

A great memorial meeting was held to celebrate the completion of the statue. The citizens saluted it, shouted for joy, sang and danced. Several thousand casks of wine were drunk. In the pushing throng, several hundred people had their clothes torn and quite a few fell down and bruised their knees. From that day on, the hero was always in their thoughts, and they went about their tasks with fresh energy and enthusiasm. Whoever passed the statue would pause and bow his head in respect before going on.

It is easy for one to become conceited unless one is a sage or an imbecile. The statue being neither of course became conceited from the adoration of so many people.

"See how glorious I am!" said the statue. "I am in a unique position; I stand above everything. All the citizens bow to me and salute me, and I know that every one of them is sincere in his obeisance. This is an honour which no Buddha, immortal, or god can equal!"

This speech was not addressed to the drifting white clouds which did not care to hear what he said; nor to the rustling trees in the forest which were too busy to listen to his talk. It was addressed to the various sized stone chips at his feet. The statue was showing

off before his friends — a common practice in this world. But he held up his head and looked straight ahead; he did not lower his head or glance even casually at his companions, a thing which bespoke his great arrogance. He did not think it worth while to approach his companions or look at them. He even wanted to say: "You who stand below my feet are nothing but a batch of worthless creatures."

"Hello, you up there, what has got into your mind? You've forgotten the past!" said a small chip of stone slowly from one corner of the pedestal in a clear, emphatic voice, as if trying to wake up a drunkard.

"What?" The statue on top was taken aback, but unwilling to tone down his pride.

"In the past weren't you just like us? There was no distinction between you and us — we were one single stone."

"Right, we used to be one single stone. But after the sculptor worked on us we separated. As the chisel rose and fell, and the knife cut deeper and deeper, you fell off in small pieces. I was left alone, exalted and sublime, a statue worshipped by all the citizens. It is right and proper that I should be in this unique position. That you should be jumbled together to make a pedestal for me suits you too. You are hardly my equals, are you? If you and I are equal, then heaven and earth must be equal too!"

One of the stone chips could not help laughing.

"What are you laughing at, you simpleton?"

"You've not only forgotten the past, you've forgotten the present too."

"What about the present?"

"Even now you and we are not entirely different. We're still one thing; we've only changed our form. Just look, from the top of your head down to the bottom of our pedestal, aren't we just one thing? Besides, our present change of form means that your position is very precarious. You're standing on us. If we were to shake a bit, you wouldn't be able to stay on your perch. . . ."

"Are you the only stone chips in the world?"

"It's no use looking for other stone chips. If you fall down, that will be the end of you! You'll become a pile of small stone chips just like us."

"You scum! Stop talking nonsense. Don't you dare to scare me!" The statue was angry. Thinking he must not lose his dignity, he deliberately shouted as loudly as he could, as if he were scolding prisoners or slaves.

"He doesn't believe us," said all the stone chips together. "Let's throw him down right now."

The statue was so frightened that he forgot both his anger and his dignity. He softened his voice and said beseechingly: "Steady! Steady! We're friends, friends joined together into one body — why quarrel like this! I believe everything you say. For goodness' sake, don't throw me down!"

"Now you believe us, don't you?" they roared with laughter.

"Yes, I do, I believe everything you say."

The crisis had passed. But pride is like grass which grows every year; as soon as winter is over, fresh blades appear. So the statue, in a soft voice, again expressed his opinions of himself though less pretentiously: "I still feel I'm superior to you, because I represent a hero, a hero famous in history."

"And is history entirely reliable?" asked one of the stone chips with a sly laugh. "How can historians know and write about what people really thought and did who lived thousands of years ago? Do you think we can believe everything the historians say?"

"Especially when it comes to heroes," put in another stone chip. "They may have been fools or rogues, but historians spin a yarn and make them heroes. Nobody can disprove what is supposed to have happened in ancient times. What's even more amusing is that sometimes heroes are pure inventions, persons who never existed. Nocha and Sun Wu-kung (the Monkey) are characters in novels. Yet people are so familiar with these names that they have almost become real historic personages."

"You don't think the hero I represent is a fake, do you?" The statue was rather dismayed, and to make the stone chips believe him, he said: "Look how the

citizens commemorate and respect him. He must be a real hero of history."

"You can never be sure of that," replied six or seven chips together.

"Most citizens are prone to commemorate and worship nonentities," chimed in a perky little chip.

The statue was very displeased and muttered to himself: "What? A nonentity! But I think that to be worshipped can't be anything but a great honour. Could it be that I've been duped? . . ."

One of the stone chips in the pedestal started muttering too: "We have not only been duped but we have actually been made to suffer, as we have to support a nonentity all our lives."

Nobody said any more, each busy with his own thoughts.

In the middle of the night, the statue suddenly fell down, like a diver jumping from a springboard. Being so high together with its pedestal, it crashed down heavily and broke into thousands of pieces which lost their identity altogether. The whole thing became a mass of rubble.

The next morning, when the citizens passed the statue, they found it gone and the centre of the square covered by a heap of stone fragments. They looked at each other but could find no words to express their feelings. Quietly they went away.

The sculptor went to the heap of rubble and wept bitterly, mourning for his masterpiece. He vowed that he would never make a statue again. And he kept his word.

The disorderly heap of rubble in the middle of the square was a nuisance, and someone proposed that it should be used to build a road leading northward from the city. All the people agreed to this proposal. After the new road was built, people were able to travel about easily, and were so pleased that they held a meeting of celebration.

As the clear, beautiful sunlight shone on the new road, each stone showed a smiling face. One after the other they congratulated themselves, saying:

"We're really equal now!"

"Nothing fake about us."

"We've all gathered together to make a real road, so that people can go where they please."

1929

The Emperor's New Clothes

Certainly many people have read Hans Andersen's story, "The Emperor's New Clothes," which is about an emperor who loved to wear new clothes and was fooled by two swindlers. The swindlers claimed to be able to make for the emperor the most beautiful clothes one could ever dream of, which moreover would have the magic property of being invisible to any fool or to anyone who was not fit for his post. The emperor at once ordered the clothes made for him, and the two swindlers set about going through the motions of weaving, cutting and stitching. Several times the emperor sent his ministers to check on the progress of the work and each time they reported that they had seen the garments which were indeed beautiful. Of course they had seen nothing at all, but they did not dare to run the risk of being called a fool or, worse, of being considered as unfit for their posts.

On an appointed day when the new clothes were supposed to be ready the emperor intended to hold a grand ceremony and he would wear them for the occasion. When the day came the two swindlers asked the emperor

to take off his old clothes. Then they went through the motions of helping him into his new attire. His attendants, not wanting to be thought fools, much less as unfit for their posts, burst into a chorus of praise. The emperor nodded his satisfaction and marched out naked.

People along the road, for the same reason as stated above, praised the emperor's new clothes as if they could clearly see them. A child, however, blurted out quite innocently: "Why, that man hasn't got anything on!"

When the crowd heard this they passed the word around until everybody was laughing and shouting: "The emperor really hasn't a stitch on!" It suddenly dawned upon the emperor that he had been duped. But since the play was on he couldn't very well call it off. He drew himself up and decided to go through with it.

What happened after that? Hans Andersen didn't say, but actually there was a lot more to the story.

The emperor went on with the procession as if nothing had happened, assuming such a stiff posture that his shoulders and spine ached. The attendants holding the train of his non-existent robe were also well aware of the role they were playing in the comedy and had to bite their lips to keep from laughing, for they did not want to be called fools. As to the guards, they kept their eyes on the ground; for if ever one of them should catch the glance of a fellow guard he would be sure to burst out laughing.

The people, however, were more straightforward. It didn't occur to them to bite their lips or keep their eyes on the ground. So after the bare-faced truth that the emperor was wearing nothing had been voiced they laughed uproariously.

"Fine emperor he is to go about naked!" chuckled one.

"He must have taken leave of his senses!" guffawed another.

"Scraggy, ugly creature!" jeered a third.

"He's got shoulders and legs like a plucked chicken!" put in a fourth.

These remarks both humiliated and angered the emperor. He stopped in the procession and snapped at his ministers: "Did you hear those fools and disloyal subjects wagging their tongues? Why don't you stop them? My new robes are most elegant, and wearing them adds to my royal dignity. Isn't that what you've all been saying? From now on I will wear these clothes and nothing else. Anyone who dares to say I'm naked is a scoundrel and a traitor and is to be arrested and put to death. This is a new law. Have it proclaimed at once."

The ministers got busy at once. They ordered the bandsmen to blow their trumpets for the people to gather together and proclaimed the new law at the top of their voice. For a time laughing and jeering stopped and the emperor, feeling appeased, went on with the procession.

He had not gone very far, however, before giggling and gibes assailed his ears again like a burst of fireworks.

"Not a stitch on him!"

"Nasty, pasty skin!"

"Look at his ribs sticking out!"

"What kind of new clothes are those anyhow!"

Each remark was punctuated by laughter.

The emperor was irritated again. He glowered at his ministers angrily and bellowed: "Did you hear that?"

"We heard it, Your Majesty," answered the ministers trembling.

"Have you forgotten the new law I just made?"

Without waiting for the emperor to finish the ministers ordered the soldiers to arrest all those who had laughed and jeered.

Confusion followed. The soldiers rushed hither and thither, using their spears to round up those who were trying to escape. Many people fell down; some escaped by vaulting over others. Screams and sobs were heard instead of jeers and laughter. Some fifty people were seized and the emperor gave order to have them executed on the spot, showing his subjects that his word was iron law and that nobody should make light of it.

From that time onwards the emperor, of course, wore nothing. In harem or audience hall he went about naked, from time to time going through the motions of

smoothing out the folds of his robe. His concubines and courtiers, though amused at first when they saw the scraggy, pasty creature acting like that, gradually learned to keep straight faces as if nothing were the matter. Indeed they no longer found it ridiculous and looked upon the emperor as if he were fully clothed. And this was absolutely necessary to the concubines and courtiers, for if they acted otherwise they would run the risk of losing their posts or even their lives. But despite their painstaking attention a moment's carelessness could bring disaster to any one of them as two instances will show.

One day the emperor's favourite concubine was standing beside him while he was drinking, and she tried to please him by pouring a cup of red wine for him and raising it to his lips. "Drink this," she said in her most flattering manner, "and may you live for ever!"

The emperor was pleased and drained the cup. But he must have drained it too quickly, for he coughed, and wine streamed onto his chest.

"Oh, you've stained your chest!"

"What? My chest!"

The favourite concubine's pretty face turned pale when she realized her mistake. "No, not your chest," she corrected herself, her voice trembling. "You've stained your robe."

"You said I'd stained my chest. Isn't that the same as saying I'm not wearing any clothes? Fool! You're disloyal and you've broken my law!" With this the emperor shouted, "Take her to the executioner," and his attendants dragged her away.

The other instance concerned a very learned minister. Though he had forced himself into the same habit as the others, he could not help feeling, whenever the emperor held audience, that it was altogether too incongruous to call a man "emperor" who sat on the throne naked. It would be far more proper to address him as "bald monkey," he thought. He was afraid that one day he might make a slip or laugh at the wrong time, which would bring ruin on him. So, under the pretext of going home to look after his old mother, he asked the emperor to release him from his post.

"I cannot but grant the request of a filial son," the emperor said and gave him permission to retire.

The minister thanked him and was about to take leave. Feeling as relieved as if he had just been freed from heavy fetters he muttered: "Thank Heaven, I won't have to look at that naked emperor any more."

The emperor, not quite sure he had caught the remark, asked his attendants: "What was that he said?"

Unable to extemporize, the attendants told the truth.

"So it's because you couldn't bear to see me that you asked to resign!" roared the emperor. "Now you have broken my law! I will see to it that you never get

home!" Forthwith he ordered his executioner to take the minister out and kill him.

After that everyone took the greatest care not to violate his law either in the harem or in the audience hall.

The ordinary people, however, had not acquired the tact of the concubines and courtiers. Whenever the emperor appeared and they saw his affectations and how scraggy he looked, they couldn't help joking and laughing about him. Bloody executions would follow. On one day when the emperor went to offer sacrifices to heaven three hundred people were killed. On another day when he reviewed his troops five hundred were killed; while during an imperial tour of the capital more than a thousand were killed because the emperor passed through many streets and a large number of people laughed at him.

A kind old minister felt that these mass executions were too cruel and ought to be stopped. But the emperor would never admit that he was wrong; anyone who said that the emperor had made a mistake would be making a grave mistake himself. The old minister thought that if only a way could be found to induce the emperor to wear clothes again that would put an end to the jeers and laughter and thus to the executions. He spent several sleepless nights trying to think of the best and safest way to do this.

Finally he hit upon a plan and went to the court to see the emperor. He said: "As a loyal subject I want to make a suggestion which I hope Your Majesty will consider. You have always liked new clothes and with good reason, for new and splendid robes seem to increase greatly your glory and dignity. Now, you haven't had any new clothes made for some time; probably because you've been so busy with affairs of state that it has escaped your attention. The clothes you're wearing are fading in colour. Why don't you order your tailors to make you some new clothes so that you can have a change?"

"Fading in colour?" The emperor looked at his "robe," passing his hand over his body. "Nonsense! These are magic clothes — their colour can never fade. Didn't you hear me say I was never going to wear anything else? You want me to take them off because you want me to look ugly and become unlucky. Well, in view of your past service and old age I won't have you executed, but you'll spend the rest of your days in jail!"

The old minister had taken so much pains for nothing and the executions continued as before. Moreover, the fact that there was no end to the people's laughing at him got on the emperor's nerves, so he made a yet stricter law. He decreed that wherever the emperor passed the people must make no noise whatsoever. Anyone uttering anything at all would be committing a crime and would be liable to capital punishment.

The emperor's proclamation of this law made all the honest people feel he was going too far. Of course it was not right to laugh at the emperor, but why should people be put to death for talking about other things? So they filed up to the palace where they knelt down, saying they wanted to submit a petition to the emperor.

Rather alarmed the emperor came out and blustered: "What have you come here for? Are you going to rise in rebellion?"

The honest citizens dared not raise their heads but replied hastily: "Oh, no, Your Majesty, you have misjudged us. We are contemplating nothing of the sort." Somewhat relieved, the emperor assumed a sterner and more dignified air as he smoothed his non-existent clothes and asked: "What have you come for then?"

"We beg Your Majesty to return us our freedom to talk and laugh. Those who malign you and laugh at you are of course bad people and should be killed. But we are all good, honest citizens and we ask you to repeal your new law."

"How can you have freedom?" demanded the emperor. "If you want freedom you can't be my subjects. If you want to be my subjects you must obey my laws. And mine are iron laws. Repeal them? Nothing doing!" Saying this he turned around and went back to his inner apartments.

The honest citizens did not dare to say anything more. Gradually they began to raise their heads a little and,

seeing the emperor had gone, knew there was nothing for them to do but to return home. After that they adopted a new tactic: when the emperor came out they stayed at home behind closed doors; they refrained from appearing in the streets.

One day the emperor set out with his ministers and guards for his *château.* All the roads along which they passed were deserted and the doors of the houses on both sides were closed. The only sound they heard was the thumping of their own feet as they proceeded silently like an army marching in the night.

Suddenly the emperor stopped and, pricking up his ears, roared at his ministers: "Did you hear that?"

The ministers strained their ears to listen.

"Yes, a child is crying," one of them replied.

"A woman is singing," reported another.

"That man must be drunk — he's giggling," said a third.

When the emperor saw his ministers making so light of the matter he was very angry. "Have you forgotten the new law I made?" he bellowed.

The ministers shouted their obedience and ordered the guards to break into all houses and arrest the people — old and young, men and women — who had uttered any sound and turn them over to be killed.

But something quite unexpected happened. When the guards broke open the doors crowds of men, women and children rushed out. Dashing up to the emperor

they reached for his body with hands like talons, tearing his flesh and shouting: "Off with those non-existent clothes! Off with them!"

Then a most comic and confused scene followed. Men twisted the emperor's withered arms and women drummed with their plump white fingers on his dark brown chest. Two children pushed their way up to him and, raising their little hands, plucked the hair under his arms. Thus besieged, the emperor could find no way of escape. He tried to avoid the punishment by ducking and rolling himself up like a hedgehog, but that did not help. The plucking and scratching at his armpits gave him an unbearable itching sensation and, though he tried to press his arms against his body he could not escape the ordeal. All he could do was to draw his head in between his shoulders, frown, sniffle and grimace, causing no end of mirth among the people.

Emerging from the people's houses, the guards saw how comical the emperor looked — like a monkey stung by hornets — and forgetting the respect they ought to show him, they joined in the general laughter. This at first frightened the ministers; but then they glanced furtively at the emperor and burst out laughing too.

While they were all doubled up in fits of laughter it suddenly occurred to them that they were breaking the emperor's law and were liable to be arrested. Before this, whenever people poked fun at the emperor, the ministers had been the ones to help him punish them,

but now they were laughing at him too. Then they took another good look at him. Patches of black and blue covered his body and, huddled up, he looked like a chicken caught in the rain — a very funny sight! Isn't it natural for people to laugh at funny things? But the emperor had made a law forbidding people to laugh. What an absurd law! Thereupon they joined the people in shouting: "Off with your non-existent clothes! Off with them!"

When the emperor saw that his ministers and guards had gone over to the people and no longer stood in awe of him he was so shocked that he fell senseless to the ground as if he had been struck on the head with a sledge hammer.

1930

The Sensitive Plant

A little wild plant grew beside the roses. It was short and ugly with jagged leaves like the teeth of a broken comb and stems as thin as hemp cord. Standing beside the roses, it attracted little attention, for how could it compare with them? Their sleek leaves seemed to have been carved from the greenest of jade and their plump buds were like the teats of a milch cow. Passers-by stopped to gaze at them. "How beautiful!" they exclaimed. "The roses are in bloom!"

"How fortunate we are to have been born roses!" remarked one of the rosebuds with a proud toss of her head. "And we do not know anything of the happiness that yet lies ahead for us. Let's tell our wishes now. The spring is long and it's so boring keeping silent all the time."

"I would like to go on a pleasant journey," a pink bud spoke up first. "I am beautiful and that's no exaggeration. Anybody who has eyes can see that. The people who will go with me will be wealthy gentlemen and ladies because only such are worthy of my company. Their clothes will be scented with incense compounded

of aromatic Huangtong wood and sprayed with Paris perfume. And I, as a *boutonnière,* shall be the most fragrant and ravishing of all! I shall look down upon everything. How glorious it will be! Needless to say we will travel in nothing but first-class coaches where the seats are upholstered with eider-down and are exceedingly soft and comfortable! The curtain will be of brocade, of course, with designs by famous artists so that one can enjoy the pictures when the curtain is drawn. The light in the coach will be so diffused that one will want to take a little snooze, though it would be even better to draw aside the curtain and watch the green fields and wooded hills whirling by. To make such a comfortable journey would indeed be most rewarding!"

"You are quite right," perked up several of the buds which had been standing idly in the warm spring sun. The pink rose's recital had made them feel as if they were already on a journey in first-class coaches pinned on the lapels of wealthy gentlemen and the bosoms of fine ladies!

"Travelling is a very pleasant thing, no doubt," a soft, slow voice was heard nearby. "But why must you sit on the lapels and bosoms of wealthy gentlemen and ladies? Can't you stand on your own feet and act according to your own will? And why have you chosen first-class coaches? I would advise you to take the fourth class."

"Listen! Where is that queer talk coming from?" the roses raised their heads to ask. The sky was blue without a single bird in view and only a few bees buzzing about the shrubs. Very likely, the birds were off playing in the woods. Unable to find the owner of the voice, they lowered their heads again. Oh, so it was a tiny wild plant which was waiting for them to answer its questions, its head raised expectantly and its body swaying like an orator's.

"The first-class coaches are more comfortable than the fourth," said the bud which yearned to travel with a faraway look in its eyes. Then, feeling it necessary to explain at greater length to the lowly little plant, which certainly knew nothing of comfort, it continued haughtily: "Don't you know that comfort is the essence of life? Life is only as worth while as it is comfortable. Without comfort one exists to no purpose. For life to have meaning one must eat delicate food and wear clothes of silk and brocade. Of course you can live with coarse food and clothing but not half as well as with delicacies, silks and brocades. That is why I can not eat coarse food or wear garments of coarse cloth. The same goes for travelling in fourth-class coaches where the seats are so filthy and the windows so small that I feel suffocated. What do you mean by advising me to travel in such coaches?"

"Of course I know what is comfortable and what is not," replied the little wild plant earnestly, "but we

have not come into this world for the sake of comfort alone. I think we must not indulge ourselves in our wishes. We must not let ourselves be isolated from our fellows. Besides, when one sees his fellows suffer while he lives in comfort and knows that their suffering is caused by his life of ease he feels guilty, and a guilty conscience means a troubled mind. No one will seek comfort if it means a guilty conscience and troubled mind. Only the heedless, who do not think and do not recognize their wrongdoing, can hanker after a life of ease."

The bud which wanted to travel laughed in cold disdain. "Do you mean to say that everybody should jam into jail-like fourth-class cars? Then the comfortable first-class coaches would be left idle and only the fourth-class cars need run to and fro on the tracks. That would be retrogression. Don't you know that we should make the world go forward and not push it backward?"

"Could it be progress you're talking about?" sneered the little wild plant. "Excuse my laughter, but sitting in a luxurious first-class coach while others pack the fourth-class cars — is that what you call progress? Every right-minded person wants to make the world go forward. But until the time when it is possible for everyone to enjoy first-class coaches, one should rather travel fourth-class than to see others suffer. Of course the fourth-class lacks the comforts of the first, but it is

better to bear some inconvenience than to do an injustice to others."

"Sh — sh — sh —" the roses hissed their annoyance at the little plant and tried to muffle it as a theatrical audience does to a poor performer. "Stop your ranting, you ignorant little herb!"

"Let's go on telling our wishes. Whose turn now?" one rosebud prompted the others.

"I should like to win the grand prize in a flower show," minced a half-blown rose with a soft trill in her voice. "No common or wild flowers would be allowed in this show — only first-rate and rare flowers grown with the greatest of care under ideal conditions. The grand-prize winner in such a show would be showered with glory, like the girl who has won first prize in a beauty contest. Of course all the judges would be highly qualified ones, with a mine of knowledge and high aesthetic standards. They would know the forms and colours of proper flowers and, with records of previous shows for reference, would make no mistake. The flower they would pick as winner would definitely be the best. How glorious it would be to be such a winner! Besides, the hall where the show would be held would be filled with refined gentlemen and ladies and I, standing in a vase of ancient pottery, which would be placed on the highest sandalwood stand, would be the centre of attraction. Can't you just picture it! Venerable flower fanciers would stroke

their beards and nod to me while generously paunched rich men would gaze upon me and beautiful ladies part their rouged lips to smile at me. Oh, I should be intoxicated with joy!"

"You have an excellent idea," said several other roses, but since there could be only one grand prize, each one thought that it should be the winner instead of the half-blown rose, for no one felt itself inferior to the half-blown rose in any respect — strain, growth, form or hue.

But the talkative little wild plant spoke up again, its voice still earnest: "It's good for you to want to excel. But why must you be grand-prize winner in a flower show? Can't you excel in some other way? And why should you place such faith in the judges? As for me, I would rather believe in the opinions of the peasants."

"Again you are talking nonsense!" scolded the roses, which knew this time who the speaker was. They looked down at the little plant, which was again waiting for their answers, its head tilted up and its body swaying.

"Believe in the peasants?" chided the rose which had been dreaming of taking first prize at the flower show, looking askance at the little wild herb. "Why, that's ridiculous! There are experts and laymen in all branches of science. The layman may sing praises by the hundred but not one would be to the point. A

single word of commendation from the expert is worth more than all else. Haven't I just told you that the judges are without exception intelligent gentlefolk well-versed in reference works and with correct aesthetic standards? They have made a special study of flowers. Why shouldn't you believe in them?" The rose swelled with pride and, twisting its body to show off its graceful lines, flung out at the small plant: "If you, you ignorant little herb, were placed beside me, it's a certainty they would choose me and cast you out. That would prove that they know what beauty is. How can you doubt their judgement?"

"I have no wish to compete with you," said the little plant evenly. "You must know that one's idea of beauty is obtained from what one's accustomed to see. The judges are accustomed to viewing chrysanthemums with flowers as big as a plate and plum blossoms on crooked branches. As to you roses, do you think your ancestors were so puffy? It is because those people are accustomed to plump blooms that gardeners puff you up so. Do you call that beauty? What about the flower fanciers, rich gentlemen, beautiful ladies and wise judges! They are birds of a feather, and have all substituted custom for taste. Their praises mean nothing."

The rosebud which dreamed of winning the grand prize was angry. It pursed its lips and said: "Do you mean that no one in the show is qualified to choose the

best — that none but the peasants have an eye for beauty? Then art is doomed!"

"Speaking of art," the little wild plant said excitedly, "do you think that art means crooked branches or posing in an ancient pottery vase on a high sandalwood stand? I think art should have strength and life. Don't you think that the peasants . . . ?"

"Don't listen to the babbling of that little wild herb," said another rosebud. "But look, someone has come to buy flowers. Maybe we'll have to leave here."

Approaching was a fat cook on whose arm was a basket. In the basket were chickens with their necks wrung, fish gasping for breath, crisp lettuce and other dainty vegetables. Behind the cook followed an old gardener, his back bent.

The old gardener took out a pair of shears and snipped off one rosebud after another till he had a big bunch of them, when a bee flew out from among their petals. Fearing that he might be stung, the old gardener flicked the bee down with his sleeve.

The bouquet of rosebuds bade the little wild plant goodbye. "We're off now," they jeered. "Glory awaits us! Won't you feel lonely, being left here alone." They stroked the little plant in mock reluctance and left.

The little herb instantly closed its jagged, comb-like leaves and drooped, looking like a bashful child with his head bowed down and arms hanging at his sides. It was ashamed — ashamed for the ignorance and cheap-

ness of the rosebuds which felt honoured by such trifles.

Then it heard a soft, low, pitiful groan. It looked around as it asked: "Who is it? What on earth has happened to you?"

"It's me — over here!" came a cry from under the rose bush. "The old gardener has hurt my leg. Oh, the pain is awful!"

The little wild plant looked down on the ground and saw the bee. "Oh, your leg is injured," it said tenderly. "You must see a doctor without delay; otherwise you'll end up a cripple."

"Heavens!" groaned the bee. "Don't let me be crippled. I wouldn't be able to balance myself on the flower petals to gather honey. I must go to a doctor right away! Where can I find one?"

"I really can't say, but I've heard that liquorice is a medicinal herb. He must know where to find a doctor. There is some liquorice growing right here beside me. Let me consult him." So the little herb turned to ask the liquorice, which told it that there were doctors on every street with golden name plaques on their doors.

"You'd better go immediately," the little herb urged the bee. "Can you fly? Better draw up your injured leg so as not to aggravate the wound."

"Thank you. I'll do as you say. I can fly, but the pain in my leg has sapped my strength so that I'll have

to fly slowly." Thus the bee took off flapping its wings with all its might.

The little wild herb was left worrying about the bee. Poor thing! It would miss so much work if it took many days for its leg to heal. It wasn't until after a long time that the little bee came winging back. Its face was sad and its wings flabby, while the injured leg was drawn up as before.

"Where have you been?" asked the little herb anxiously. "Have you consulted a doctor?"

"No. I went to the door of all the doctors in town but none would see me."

"Is your wound so serious that they could do nothing?"

"No, it's because they wanted a large sum of money before they would even look at my leg. Treatment was out of the question because I had no money. 'Don't doctors treat illnesses?' I asked them. 'Why don't you treat my wound?' But they only retorted, 'Have we nothing to do that we should treat everyone that gets sick?' 'Don't talk like that!' I said, 'you serve society by treating patients.' To this they replied, 'Don't flatter us. It's not our duty to serve society. All we know is how to get money first and then give treatment to our patients.' Again I asked, 'You talk about money all the time. What has money to do with the treatment of disease?' 'Listen,' they said, 'we have spent a lot of money to learn the trade and we want to get it

back — with interest.' There was nothing left for me to say. Since I couldn't pay their fee I had to come back with my leg uncured. My friend, I never knew there were many doctors in the world who will not give treatment to poor people." The bee was so downcast and weak that it had to support itself against the slender stem of the little wild plant.

Again the little herb was overcome with shame and again it closed its jagged tooth-like leaves and hung its head, like the bashful child with his head bowed and arms dangling at his sides. It was ashamed now for an irrational world where doctors refuse to give treatment to poor patients.

Not long afterwards a humbly-dressed man came and bought the little herb. He took it home in a pot and placed it at the door of his hut, which had a thatched roof and windowless clay walls. There was only one low, narrow door and the room looked very dark to the little plant when it peered in from the pot. There were two rows of such huts and between them was a narrow, muddy street reeking with pools of foul, murky water and abounding in mosquito larvae. Flies swarmed everywhere.

The little herb was looking around to get its bearings when suddenly a posse of policemen came up. They called the humbly-dressed man out and shouted: "You were given notice to vacate this place long ago. Why are you still here?"

"I have no place to go!" the man answered sadly.

"Nonsense! There are a lot of empty houses in the city. Why don't you go and rent one?"

"But I have no money!" said the man, turning two empty palms upward to show the policemen.

"You can't blame anybody for your poverty. These huts of yours are a public nuisance. If one catches fire hundreds will go up in flames. And the filth! The place is plagued with disease. These shanties should have been torn down long ago. In less than two days the building of a magnificent market will begin here. Move out and make it snappy. There's no use delaying."

"But where can I go? Shall I move out into the fields?" The man was very indignant.

"Who cares where you move to? But you must move out of here — that's what I say." So saying the policemen entered the hut and very soon something was flung out onto the ground. It was the cooking-pot and it rolled some distance before finally knocking against the pot of the little herb.

Shame overtook the little wild plant and once again it folded its jagged leaves and hung its head like a bashful child with his head bowed down and arms dangling at his sides. It was ashamed this time for the unreasonable world where people are driven from their homes to make way for the building of a market.

People call this little wild plant the "shy grass" or sensitive plant but few of them know why it closes up

and hangs its head. Well, I have told you — it is ashamed of the events I have related in this story.

The Silkworm and the Ant

Szz — zz — zz — the sound was like a drizzling autumn rain. It came from the silkworms munching mulberry leaves. They didn't care whether the leaves were fresh or not. They just kept on devouring them as if eating mulberry leaves were the only thing they lived for.

Soon the leaves were gone, with only the veins left and the porcelain-like, white, wriggling bodies of the silkworms came into view. Then the silkworm breeder came and covered them again with a thick layer of mulberry leaves. Presently their munching was resumed with an even louder noise, like a heavy shower brought on by a gust of autumn wind.

One silkworm, however, crouched at the edge of the bamboo tray. His chest was puffed out and his head held up; he neither ate nor moved. Was he going to sleep? Or had he eaten too much? No, neither; he was only thinking. And indeed he did have the air of a very profound thinker. He was thinking that if one kept on thinking long enough he would at last understand all things.

The first thing the silkworm wondered about was why he was living in this world. Was it only to eat mulberry leaves? He thought about how his ancestors had lived and arrived at the conclusion that when his ancestors had eaten their fill of mulberry leaves, they spun cocoons around themselves. Then men put them into scalding hot water, reeled off the silk filament, wove it into satin and made beautiful garments out of it. Apparently making cocoons was the meaning of the silkworm's life and eating mulberry leaves was important because eating them was necessary for the making of cocoons. As he was thinking, his heart sank. All the hardships his ancestors had suffered during their life were only to work for men with whom they had nothing to do. He did not feel like eating any more mulberry leaves but lay motionless at the edge of the bamboo tray, with his chest out and his head raised.

Another layer of mulberry leaves was spread and the munching immediately followed once more. But our "profound thinker" did not care to eat them nor even to look at them.

Suddenly a tiny voice called out to him: "Friend, here comes a new course! Why don't you eat? If you're so polite you'll be left out."

Without so much as turning his head the pensive silkworm muttered to himself: "You know nothing but to eat, while I am full, much too full, and don't want to eat."

"You must have had better fare somewhere else then," remarked the other silkworm. Scarcely had he finished speaking when he bit into another fresh mulberry leaf and started munching again.

"Better fare indeed! Can't you stop feeding yourselves and use your brains a bit? I'm stuffed; I'm fed up with loathing, bitter loathing."

"What is it you loathe?"

"What do I loathe? I loathe work. Nothing is more distasteful to me than work. I've decided not to do any more work from now on. I've composed a song about it. Let me sing it to you." Then he began to sing:

What is work?
It's foolish and it's silly!
We get nothing for our labour;
Our work is all in vain.
Let us do away with work;
Rather gaze at the sky and stare at the earth.
Better to spare our energy,
And live a life of leisure.

But before he had finished singing his song the silkworm who had urged him to eat crept back to munch another leaf. None of the other silkworms even noticed that one of their friends had gone on a hunger strike.

What is work?
It's foolish and it's silly!
. . . . . .

As he crooned his song he crept out of the bamboo tray. Since he had decided not to work any more he thought it wouldn't matter if he were absent from the place for a while. Furthermore he was sick of the sight of those fat-headed companions of his who knew nothing but to eat. He crawled quickly along the wooden shelf on which his tray was placed, intending to leave the place, and soon went out of the room. He stopped and listened and he could hear no more of his companions' munching. Then he puffed his chest out, lifted his head and began his life of "gazing at the sky and staring at the earth," doing nothing whatsoever.

Suddenly he felt as if his tail had been pierced by a needle and quickly swung his head around to find an ant.

"Oh, I didn't know you were alive," said the ant.

"What made you think I wasn't?" asked the silkworm.

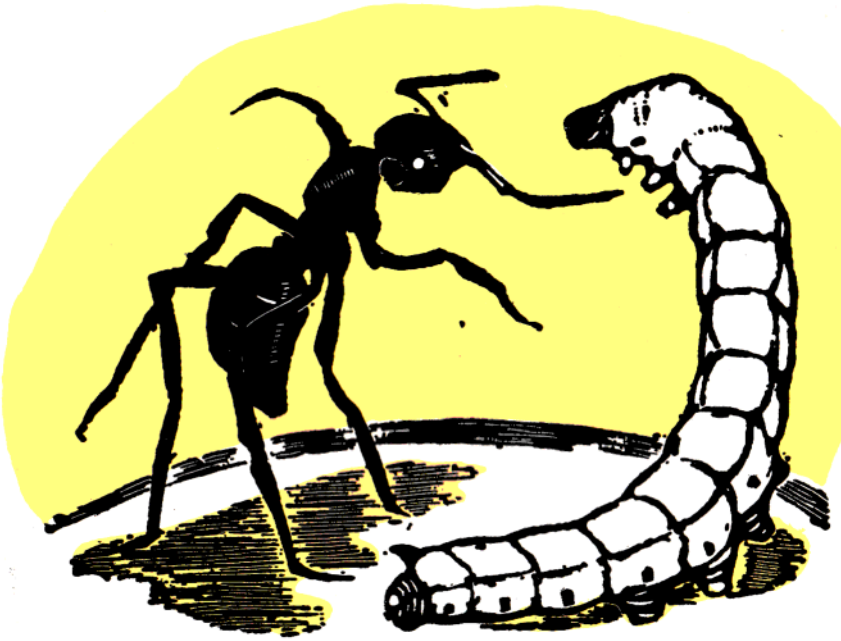
"You look like a dried-up twig fallen on the ground. I thought you must have been dead for at least three days."

"So you thought I was dead because I looked dried-up and thin."

"Yes I did. But since you are still alive, tell me why are you dried-up and thin?"

"Well, I've decided to go on a hunger strike."

"Why should you do that? Why do you want to end your life by starving yourself?"



"Because I loathe work. I've seen right through it; I've found that eating is only for the sake of work; that's why I'm not going to eat any more. Little friend, I've composed a new song. Let me sing it to you."

After listening to the silkworm listlessly singing his new song the ant could not help laughing. Then he asked: "Where did this strange thought of yours come from? You don't want to work! Doesn't that mean that you don't want to live and propagate your species?"

The silkworm looked at the ant and sighed: "Life and species — neither of these mean very much to me. Whenever I think of being immersed in scalding hot water so that my silk can be reeled off my head becomes dizzy."

"Why, I've never heard of such a thing. Probably you've overworked and got upset. We also have a song; let me sing our song to wake you up."

"You also have a song?"

"Yes, we ants all sing it. And when we sing it we feel our spirits blossoming out." With this the ant waved his feelers to keep time and began to sing:

We sing of our work all the day,
Work is life, so we sing.
Work brings rich rewards;
It brings joy and everything.
Work enables us all to live well;
It makes us happy and bright.

Work, work, work —
We'll sing of it from morn to night!

When the ant had finished singing he burst into happy laughter, threw his head back and kicked up his heels in a dance, asking as he jigged: "How do you think our song compares with that stupid one of yours? Tell me, who has the brighter future?"

The silkworm decided that the little ant was no less ignorant than his own companions who knew nothing but how to eat mulberry leaves in the bamboo tray. Otherwise, how could he be so eager to work? So he asked: "Isn't there a pot of scalding hot water waiting for you?"

The ant shook his head. "No, but we like to drink cool water. When we're thirsty we go to a nice clean pool and drink our fill."

"I'm not talking about long, cool drinks. What I ask is whether there are men ready to scald you in hot water and reel off silk from you."

"What are men? I don't understand."

The silkworm tried to explain but the more he explained the more the ant was puzzled. Then, after a pause he formulated his question another way. "Do you work in vain?" he asked.

"How can you ask such a question?" the ant asked in return, for he was greatly surprised. "How can any work be done in vain?"

"Let me ask you, how can there be any work which is not done in vain?"

"If you don't believe, come and see for yourself, then you'll understand. No work done is in vain. Once you put a bit of energy into it you contribute something to your whole kind, thus making improvement in everyone's livelihood."

"I don't get what you say at all; I only know that for all our work our whole kind only gets scalded to death."

The ant became somewhat impatient. "Stubborn gentleman," he said, "no matter how I explain it to you, you just can't understand. Come and look for yourself, then you'll know I'm not deceiving you. I have to go to work now, to find food, so I can't go with you. But here, take this letter of introduction with you." The ant stretched out a foreleg and gave a letter to the silkworm, the words of which were so small that should a human being care to read the letter he would have to use a pretty good microscope.

The silkworm took the letter, stretching himself lazily. "Thank you," he said. "Since I don't feel like working and haven't a thing in the world to do I may just as well go and take a look."

Thus the two parted, the ant running off on his food-gathering mission. In a moment he stopped, got his bearings, changed direction and dashed off again. As for the silkworm, he crawled slowly, his sluggish body moving along segment by segment, with long pauses in

between, till finally he reached the kingdom of the ants. He presented his letter of introduction to the guards at the gate and was very warmly received. The ants took him around to see the various kinds of work — transporting grain, building roads, erecting houses, looking after children — and then led him to see different places, tunnels, assembly hall, nursing rooms and storehouses. The silkworm seemed to have entered another world. The ants were all full of spirits, working very industriously and energetically. They were very happy. They seemed to take work as their life job. Finally, after the silkworm had seen everything the ants gave a party in his honour. Together they sang the song which the ant had introduced to him:

We sing of our work all the day,
Work is life, so we sing.
Work brings rich rewards;
It brings joy and everything.
Work enables us all to live well;
It makes us happy and bright.
Work, work, work —
We'll sing of it from morn to night!

The silkworm listened thoughtfully and when he heard "Work, work, work — We'll sing of it from morn to night," he could not help bursting into tears. For now he realized that indeed the work of the world was not done in vain; and that the ants had a very good reason for singing in praise of work.

The Language of Birds and Animals

Once upon a time a sparrow and a squirrel met on a cypress tree.

"Brother Sparrow, have you any news?" asked the squirrel.

"Oh yes, I have," replied the sparrow with a nod. "I heard recently that men look down upon us, saying that we are not qualified to speak as they do."

"What do they mean?" The squirrel blinked his eyes as he sank into deep thought. "We can open our mouths and say anything just as they do. Why should they say we are not qualified?"

"I've made it too simple," said the sparrow. "What men mean is that their language is noble while ours is far below their standard. Their speech is worthy to be put in written form, carved on stones or broadcast, while ours is not."

"Where does this news of yours come from?"

"From an educationist," answered the bird. "Yesterday, when I went out to play I alighted upon the eaves of the house of an educationist and saw the man with his head bent writing an article. The words, 'The

Language of Birds and Animals,' in the title caught my eye and I wondered why he should write about us. Of course I could not help reading further. Well, he was commenting on the primary school textbooks written by men and said that sometimes such textbooks use the language of birds and animals. That is not good, he thought — how can children make friends with birds and animals? He also wrote that many educationists are of the opinion that it would be the ruin of mankind if children were to read in the language of birds and animals. They would certainly become muddle-headed children and behave like birds and animals. His conclusion was that such 'language' would have to be completely cleared away from primary school textbooks if education were to have any chance of improvement."

The squirrel raised his right forepaw, scratched his chin and said: "True, we have our own language but we do not ask men to use it in their primary school textbooks. They have done that of their own accord and now they say that our language is no good! If their pupils are muddle-headed and ill-behaved they will surely put the blame on us. Men are so foolish and conceited!"

"What makes me mad is that educationist's arrogance. What does he mean by saying 'how can children make friends with birds and animals'? What does he mean by saying that 'they would certainly become muddle-headed children and behave badly like birds

and animals'? Does it deprive them of their dignity to make friends with us? What makes men consider us muddle-headed and our behaviour improper? Are they so clear-minded in every respect and is their behaviour so perfect?" Then, puffing out his chest feathers, the sparrow fell into a violent rage as though he had been caught in a snowstorm.

The squirrel, being a level-headed little creature, smiled to comfort the sparrow and said to him: "Why should you be so upset? If they are arrogant towards us we can pay them back in their own coin. However, to acquire knowledge and experience, we must make a thorough investigation. Now the thing I'd like to find out is whether man's language is really as noble as they claim? What after all is the difference between their language and ours?"

"I'm quite sure their language is inferior to ours," chirped the sparrow, still furious.

"Brother Sparrow," said the squirrel, "you are rather rash to say that. To comment on and judge a thing without sufficient grounds is to make an arbitrary judgement. This is not the right way to do things and I hope you will not do it again. If we want a firm basis for our judgement we'd better go and carry out an on-the-spot investigation in places where men live."

"Let's go then," said the sparrow, flapping his wings ready to set out. "I hope we'll find plenty of material so that we can put it in our primary school textbooks

that man's language is most despicable and worthless. We, the birds and animals, must never use it."

"If you've finished voicing your complaints let's set out. You fly and I'll just keep up with you by running and skipping from tree to tree."

They set out at once, passing deep forests and yellow and green fields till they came to a city inhabited by men and stopped on the eaves of a three-storey building.

The streets were full of people; their heads, covered with bushy hair, swayed like the waves of the sea. As they moved on they raised their empty hands high in the air and shouted: "We have hands; we want work!" Then, beating their sunken bellies, they yelled: "We have stomachs; we want to eat!" The people's yelling and shouting merged into one loud uproar.

After watching for a moment the squirrel turned and said to the sparrow: "What those people said in their slogans is entirely right. With hands they must work and with stomachs they must eat. Isn't this the simplest and plainest truth?"

The sparrow nodded agreement, but just as he was about to speak he noticed a disturbance down in the street. Scores of people, all dressed alike, dashed up with short white clubs in their hands and black shining revolvers at their waists. When they reached the mass of shouting people they spread out and raised their clubs, beating about wildly in an attempt to break up the crowd. The people, however, only clung to each

other closer, their heads like ocean waves, refusing to be dispersed. Then, they halted a brief moment before continuing their determined march forward.

"We have hands; we want work!"

"We have stomachs; we want to eat!"

Flying into a rage the men with clubs shouted back at them: "Shut up! How dare you make such a row? If you keep up your barking like dogs and your cawing like crows, we'll make it hot for you!"

The sparrow nudged the squirrel with his wing and said to him: "Listen, those two sentences in the men's slogans which you consider correct are branded as the language of birds and animals by those fellows with clubs. The people are forbidden to speak it. I don't think this is merely a matter of foolishness and conceit. There must be other reasons."

"Yes, there must be other reasons; indeed there must be!" agreed the squirrel. "But still we can't make head or tail of it. One thing is sure though — men call anything they don't like to hear the language of birds and animals, dog's barking and crow's cawing. Probably they have a lot of other names for it too."

"And that's why men advocate clearing away the language of birds and animals from their primary school textbooks," the sparrow concluded.

While the squirrel and the sparrow were chatting the crowd in the streets moved on farther and farther. Still, from afar, they could see the clubs rising and falling

upon the heads of the people who kept their ranks closed and continued to shout. After a while the people turned into a side street and were no longer to be seen but their voices could still be heard, though not so loud. The squirrel, patting the sparrow on the back, said: "Let's move on and perhaps we'll see something else."

"All right," agreed the sparrow, already spreading his wings to fly. The squirrel followed closely behind, nimbly leaping from rooftop to rooftop.

After flying and leaping for some time they came to a big square where a whole army seemed to be massed — infantry, cavalry, artillery, and even aeroplane and tank units, which in a bird's-eye view looked like so many blocks cut out neatly with a knife. Facing them was a bronze statue of a helmeted man on horseback, who, with his upturned moustaches, looked forbidding indeed.

"What is all this?" the sparrow asked. "Let's take a look." And saying this, he alighted on the helmet of the statue. The squirrel too climbed up and stood on the right moustache, his tail turning up along its curve. From below it looked as if a small tuft of hair on the man's face had been left unshaven.

Then, suddenly, in the blare of horns and ruffle of drums, the soldiers raised their hands in salute. A man with high cheekbones, bulging eyeballs and the mouth of a rhinoceros strode up onto the platform at the foot

of the statue, swung around to face the soldiers and began to bluster like firecrackers exploding.

"Our enemies are barbarians. We will conquer them with our civilization! We'll bring them to their knees with our rifles, cannons, aeroplanes and tanks! If they dare to protest it will be as useless as the snorting of pigs or the quacking of ducks. Beginning from today, when you start out, you must exert all the power of civilized people to silence those barbarians once and for all!"

"Now he too says that what he doesn't want to hear is the language of birds and animals," the squirrel whispered, cocking his head to one side.

"Things like rifles and cannons are obviously for the purpose of killing people and destroying things. How can they call themselves civilized?"

"Probably in that orator's vocabulary words such as 'civilized' and 'barbarian' do not have the same meaning as in ours."

"From what he says fierce lions and cruel hawks are evidently the most civilized. But we consider them the most barbarous creatures because they are so brutal as to devour us in one mouthful whenever they can catch us."

"If I were a man," sneered the squirrel, "I'd certainly say that what the orator has said is the language of birds and animals!"

"Look!" the sparrow said, pointing with his wing, "they're setting out now. Let's follow them and see what they'll do to those whom they call barbarians."

The squirrel slipped down from his seat on the bronze statue and scampered closely at the heels of the troops. When they boarded a ship to cross the sea, he hid in the hold of the vessel. As for the sparrow, sometimes he would perch on the mast and sometimes go to find something to eat or have a chat with the squirrel. They kept each other company throughout the voyage and together enjoyed the beauty of the sea and sky.

After several days the soldiers went ashore in the land of the barbarians. But however much they searched, neither the sparrow nor the squirrel could find anything else but the same mountains, fields, city and people, with nothing especially barbarous about them. They left the soldiers and before long came to a big square where troops stood in files, some with spears in their hands and others carrying broken-barrelled rifles. They had no cannons, aeroplanes or tanks.

"Brother Sparrow, I understand now."

"What do you understand?"

"People like these who have no good rifles, cannons, aeroplanes or tanks are called barbarians," said the squirrel, pursing his lips and pointing to the poorly equipped troops. "Those who have weapons like the men who brought us here call themselves civilized."

As the sparrow was about to speak he noticed a tall man with black whiskers and eyes burning with indig-

nation stepping before the troops. He raised his voice and spoke to the soldiers:

"The enemy has invaded our territory! They have come to kill us and plunder our land. Since they are worse than bandits there is but one thing for us to do: resist!"

"Resist!" repeated the soldiers in chorus as they raised high their long spears and broken-barrelled guns and waved them in the air.

"We'll resist to our last drop of blood! Not to resist means to wait for death!"

The sparrow was quite moved and tears welled up in his eyes. "If I were a man," he muttered, "for the sake of my conscience I'd call what these people say the true human language."

"Don't you remember what the first orator said?" the squirrel reminded him. "According to him all that these people say is pigs' snorting and ducks' quacking."

After deep thought the sparrow replied: "Now I realize that man's language is not entirely despicable and worthless. At first I thought the human language was inferior to the language of birds and animals. You said I was making a snap judgement and indeed I was."

"Now I think men can be classified into two groups, one speaking reason and the other not. Though they think they all use the human language, we cannot speak about them as the same. Our language, the language of birds and animals, is entirely different from theirs. We

all talk reason. We call a spade a spade and there's no mistake about it. Herein lies the difference between the language of birds and animals and that of men."

Whir — whir — whir —

A dark shadow like that of an eagle flew over and the soldiers in the square immediately dispersed and hid among the trees. The dark shadow became bigger and bigger and turned out to be an aeroplane. It made several dives and then dropped a silver-coloured object.

Boom!

The ground shook, and tree trunks, human bodies and earth all flew up as if a tornado had suddenly swept through the square.

The sparrow was so frightened that his breath was quite taken away and, spreading his wings, he darted off. He did not stop until he reached the sea where he inhaled deeply but seemed to smell gunpowder even there.

The more self-possessed squirrel skittered over the many mangled corpses in his way and met streams of people fleeing from their homes. They led cows and sheep, held babies in their arms and carried household sundries with shoulder poles. But his feathered friend was nowhere to be found. I'm afraid Brother Sparrow is among the casualties, he thought to himself.

1935

The Experience of a Locomotive

I was born in a machine shop in England and came to China to serve the Chinese people. I have a big belly and the workers feed me continuously with chunks of glistening black coal. I eat and eat as if I were a bottomless pit, and when I have digested the coal a burst of energy invigorates my whole body and I want to run and run. I would feel splendid if I could run tens of thousands of miles in one breath. I have eight wheels, which are my feet. They are strong and quick but different from the feet of any animal. When my big wheels start turning not even the fastest horse can keep pace with me. I have one big eye and at night I can see the road ahead clearly even though there be neither moon nor stars. My voice is particularly strong and, when I whistle, the trees along the way tremble and quiver and the clouds overhead scurry about like water ruffled by the wind.

For the several years I have been in China I have run back and forth between Shanghai and Nanjing. The route is so familiar that I know every landmark between the two cities even with my eyes closed. There are

caves in the Baogai Mountain, pagodas in various cities, the Yangcheng Lake, noted for its crabs, and the towering chimneys of the industrial centre of Wuxi. But it's unnecessary to name them all! I can even tell you the exact spot where an old farmer and his wife live in a cottage behind a bamboo grove. I can also tell you about a small stone bridge where fishermen often come to fish. I know these places as well as I know my own name. And why shouldn't I? I pass them in my trips to and fro every day.

I love to serve the people, and since I have enormous strength and can run very fast, I feel depressed if I have to stand still very long and cannot make use of my boundless energy. Besides, the people I serve are so nice. There are students on their way to school and peasants taking grain and vegetables to the market. There is an old lady with a basket of presents who is going to her daughter's for a visit, and a traveller making a tour of beauty spots with a guide-book in his hand. They all have some business to do and always greet me warmly, so I feel that it is only right for me to serve them.

But sometimes I feel blue too. Like the time I was ordered by a man — I have no idea who he was — to take him alone to a certain place. On that trip, none of the other passengers — the students, peasants, the old lady and the tourist — came and I served that one man alone. Now, don't you think it's enslavement to

serve only one person? With him were his bodyguards: all were in military uniform and had bandoleers around their waists and rifles slung over their shoulders. They weren't interested in going anywhere; they were only at the service of that one man. Don't you think they were all slaves too? But let's not go too far. . . . Later, when I found out why the man wanted to go to that place in such a rush, I was highly indignant. He went just to see a friend whom he'd seen only three days ago; then, after chatting with him for a while, he went to a bathhouse and later called on a pretty girl and took her to a dancehall. Why should I be the slave of such a man? If I'm asked to perform such a service again I'll rebel — I won't go. The shame is that my engine is controlled by others. Once they get me started I can do nothing but run. Several times along the way I thought I'd run off the track and destroy myself and that hateful man too. During that trip I had no heart to look at the scenery along the way, and my voice was so choked with indignation that it sounded like lions roaring in the zoo.

Yesterday morning while I was standing in the station, with my belly full of coal and new energy flowing into my eight wheels, ready for a dash, a crowd of two or three thousand boy and girl students suddenly rushed into the station. They were all in school uniform, and

I judged their ages to be from thirteen or fourteen to nearly thirty. They reminded me of — let's see — oh yes, of the soldiers who fought in the war against Japan in Shanghai in 1932. Brave and self-possessed, they would not bat an eye should a mountain suddenly collapse before them. From their conversation I knew that they were worried about a problem of national importance and wanted me to take them to present an appeal to certain persons.

Now, this was really something which I ought to do. It is more important for students to voice their opinions when their country is in danger than to take students to school, or peasants to sell their produce. How could I refuse to lend them a helping hand? "Come on," I said. "I'll take you there. I'll run very fast and get you to your destination as soon as possible." As I was thinking, I suddenly whistled: "Woo — oo — oo."

As if they knew what I was thinking the whole crowd of students gaily trooped into the passenger coaches at my back, soon packing them so full that some could only stand on the foot-board, grasping the railings with their hands. They said: "We are not out on a pleasure jaunt and we don't mind being uncomfortable so long as we can reach our destination."

All of a sudden a number of policemen dashed up, elbowing their way into the carriages and shouting for the regular passengers to get off. They said that the train would not run. I did not understand what it was

all about. I had just been fed with fresh coal to do some service for the students. Why should they say that the train would not run? I felt so sorry, seeing the disappointed passengers get off the train with their suitcases in their hands and parcels under their arms, that I felt as if I owed them a debt. I wanted to say: "I am always willing to serve you but unfortunately I can't today."

After most of the regular passengers had got off the policemen asked the students to get off too, telling them that the train would not run. I believed that the students had taken the train for a just and important cause and did not think that they would be so easily discouraged and get off the train as the other passengers had done.

As I expected the students shouted: "We won't get off the train until we arrive at our destination." Their voices roared like a surging tide.

"Woo — oo —" I responded to their shouts with a whistle meaning to say: "I have the energy and the will to take you to your destination!"

Things were at an awkward pass. The whole squad of policemen could not drag two or three thousand students off the train. All they could do was to surround the station as if a war were breaking out. It made quite a scene. Some of the passengers went home but others still sat on their seats in the stationary train.

The policemen stood like wooden stakes stuck in the ground, looking drawn and pale as if cornered by a deadly enemy. In all my several years in China this was the first time that I had met with such a situation. No sooner had the curious crowd outside the iron fence been dispersed by the policemen than they gathered again to watch.

Then a band of sullen-looking men came one after another, some in foreign dress and some in blue growns and black jackets. There were old men with grey beards and young men with gold-rimmed spectacles, whose faces were so shiny that one would think they had been rubbed with a good half jar of cold cream. And the worried look on their faces as they ran into the carriages to talk with the students! They must be in a terrible predicament judging by their looks. I didn't hear what they said to the students but I guessed it must have been the same as the policemen had said: that the train was not going and that they'd better go home. Otherwise why should they look so worried?

But I did hear every word the students said. "We won't get off until we're at our destination!" roared their young voices like a surging tide.

"Woo — oo —" Every time I heard their shouts I responded with a whistle meaning to say: "I sympathize with you and am willing to serve you and take you to your destination."

A long time passed. If I had been allowed to run I would have gone hundreds of miles by then. But the problem was not yet solved, for more men with sullen-looks were coming up. They boarded the train, talked to the students for a while and then got off looking still more sullen. The wind was roaring as if challenging me to a race but I was not afraid of the wind. As soon as my engine was started and I was allowed to go the wind would have to give way at once. Neither were the students afraid of the wind. Some stood by the windows, looking out, their eyes burning with indignation. Some got off the train and walked up and down the platform. They all looked as heroic as soldiers at the front, firmly holding their ground. When they were hungry they ate the food they had brought with them and when they were thirsty they drank water boiled in a boy scout's kettle. They said that as long as the train stayed there, they would stay there too, and I could see that every one of them had the determination to do so. The policemen, having stood like wooden posts for so long, looked tired and became drowsy. Some of them yawned while others complained of having no cigarettes and of aching legs.

The situation was getting my dander up. I have my own strength, I thought, I can take them anywhere I wish. It has nothing to do with those policemen. Why should they prevent me from taking the students to their destination? I'm used to work. I always feel bet-

ter after a few round trips when I begin to sweat all over. Why should I become a lazy-bone standing idle like this for more than ten hours? I don't like to be idle; it makes me feel bored.

I wanted to start. "Woo — oo —" I whistled. If only my wheels could turn, neither an army of soldiers nor ten thousand wild horses could stop me, let alone those sullen-faced men and the worn-out policemen. "Woo — oo —" I wanted to start but my wheels would not turn. Then I realized what the trouble was: my engine was controlled by others. If I had been free to do what I wanted, I would have taken the students to their destination long ago. I would never have served a man who went out merely to take a bath and visit a pretty girl. "Oh," I said, "who will start my engine? Woo — oo —"

Someone must have heard me, for the driver suddenly came and started my engine with those experienced hands of his. "Oh, wonderful! I can go now, I can help the students! Woo —" and I dashed off like the wind.

"We have succeeded at last!" The students' voices roared again like a surging tide. A gale was still blowing but its roar was drowned in the shouts of the students.

Snowflakes began to fall like wild duck's feathers flying about. However, I've never been afraid of snow and cold, for everything melts away at the radiation of

heat from my body. Even a block of ice would melt the moment it came in contact with me, not to mention those feathery snowflakes. The students didn't mind the cold either but leaned out of the windows and caught some of the snowfalkes in their hands. Then together they sang the song *Marching in the Snow.*

The rails slipped away under my wheels as the fields, rivers, villages and trees whirled by in the darkness. The snow flew in the wind like dust in the air while I ran at top speed carrying the high-spirited, dauntless students on their patriotic mission.

Suddenly the driver throttled down the engine and left, and I was restrained by a force that pulled me to a gradual stop. Why? I wondered and sighed in distress. Looking ahead I saw a wide river whose flowing water was singing a melancholy song. Ah, so this was where we were. I remembered that in the fine weather of spring and autumn I often brought tourists to this spot and they went rowing and singing on the river. But these students were not tourists. They were worried about the danger facing their country and not one of them felt like enjoying himself that day. But why should we stop here?

The students were also astonished and shouted: "Why do we stop here? Go on. Don't stop until we arrive at our destination!" They shouted at the top of their voices as if blaming me for the halt.

"My dear students," I thought, "I wish I could take you to your destination at once but my engine has been throttled down. Hurry, find the driver and make him start it again. Then I'll run for all I'm worth, even faster than before." As I was thinking I sighed sadly.

About a dozen students came to see what was the matter and, failing to find the driver, they knew the probable reason of his absence and immediately went back to tell the others.

"Look for the driver! Let's find him!" shouted the students. "He can't have gone far away in this out-of-the-way place." Then they began a search in every one of the carriages — they looked under the seats, in the toilets, even in the luggage-van and in the corner of the train where the pedlar put his wares. But still there was no trace of the driver. The students kept up their search, however, until at last they found him huddled in a small cupboard in the kitchen with a napkin over his head. They brought him to me, asking him to start my engine right away.

My dear old friend the driver was so embarrassed that he half closed his eyes and looked like a thief who had been caught red-handed. I had never seen him look like that before. Usually he was a jolly old fellow who sang popular songs as he drove the train. But now he was a totally different man. The most curious thing was that though he was standing close to my hot body

he was shivering like a beggar running after people on the streets in winter.

"I am sorry, gentlemen, I simply can't drive the train any further," he muttered after a moment in a low tremulous voice.

"Why can't you drive the train further?" the students asked him.

"I've been ordered not to do so by my superiors."

"Why did you drive it at all then?"

"That was also on the order of my superiors. They told me to bring you here. So here you are, but I can take you no further."

"So that's what has happened!" the students exclaimed. "But let's forget your superiors' orders. You go ahead and drive it for us." The students pushed and pulled him into his place and some even guided his hands to the control panel. How could he, alone, say "no" to so many students? Of course he couldn't. So slowly he started the engine, his hands trembling as if he were handling a poisonous snake and not an engine.

"Good old friend, start my engine quickly!" I said. "Once you start it I shall be able to run at top speed and the students will feel most grateful to you!"

But my friend's hands were so stiff that they seemed to be unable to make any movement. The students stared at him. Suddenly two big teardrops rolled down his cheeks and he said mournfully: "If I go any

further I'll be shot. Gentlemen, I've a family to support."

"Ah, that would be too cruel, too merciless!"

"Let him go then," sympathized several of the taller students. "To make him die and cause his whole family sorrow and trouble is something we must never do! Some of us who are studying mechanical engineering know something about engines. Let's try to do it ourselves."

"Good, let's try; we've found a way out at last!" All showed their agreement by cheerful shouts, and some of the older students began to work my engine while my friend sneaked away like a mouse.

Again the rails slipped away under my wheels, and the fields, rivers, villages and trees whirled by in the darkness. The wind was blowing and snowflakes flew in the air like dust. I ran at top speed, carrying the enthusiastic, dauntless students on their patriotic mission.

Then all of a sudden I saw a break in the road ahead — a number of rails were missing. Half a minute more and I'd reach the break and an unthinkable disaster would occur! It wouldn't matter if I died, but what of the students! Their young bodies would be buried in mud and their high spirits would be no more. How could I bear to see such a tragedy happen! "Woo — oo — oo —" I whistled with all my might, extremely

alarmed. However I was powerless to stop the train myself.

Then, just in the nick of time a tall strong student quickly pulled the brake and I came to a halt only a few feet from the break. I was relieved but I panted for breath.

When the students knew about our close call many of them got off to take a look. It was biting cold, and in the darkness their bodies were soon thickly covered with snow, but they took no notice of it. By the light of my huge eye they saw that the rails had been taken away but could not be seen anywhere around. Where had they been hidden?

"Let's search for the rails as we did for the driver," someone suggested. And the students at once scattered and searched along both sides of the railway track. Like scouts they would run a little distance, then stop and look around, but for half an hour they found nothing.

Then an excited voice rang out from the bank of a small stream: "Here they are!" and all the students made a dash for the stream. The water was frozen over but there were some blackish bars in the form of an "H" sticking out. How could they be anything but the rails?

"With the rails we'll be able to repair the railway."

"Come along, you who are studying railway engineering! Come and get some practical experience in laying rails!"

"We'll have to get the rails out of he stream first."

"Very well, let's pull them out," all echoed loudly.

They broke the ice and pulled out the deeply sunken rails one by one. The icy water splashed over their shoes and socks, chilling their feet and legs to the bone, but they didn't mind it at all. Instead they sang *The Road Builders* as they pulled the rails out of the stream and carried them back to relay them.

Who has blocked our way with barriers?
Who has beset our path with obstacles?
Don't wail or wince, nor say the road is hard to travel;
For wailing and wincing will not help to overcome our difficulties.

Be strong!
Gird yourself with will and might
To ignite the dynamite
That's laid beneath the earth.

Boom! Boom! Boom!
The earth shakes,
Mountains collapse,
Hills tumble down.

The path is open,
Let's set to work;
With our chests thrown out
Let us march on together.

We are the pioneers building a road;
We will open the road for others.

Boom! Boom! Boom!
Ha, ha, ha. . . . Boom!

The snowflakes cut their faces like razors; the cold wind pierced their bodies like thousands of arrows, but they paid no attention to it.

However, as they were laying the rails on the wooden sleepers they found that there were no rail spikes. Some of the students shouted: "We must look for the spikes."

"Probably they are also in the stream. Let's go back and fish them out!"

One after another the students jumped into the icy stream and groped about for the spikes. "Here's one!" a student cried. "I've also found one," called out another. Each discovery of a spike was greeted with cheers.

Now, my heart is pretty hard and I don't weep easily. But when I saw those "fishermen" on that snowy night I was so moved that I could not help shedding tears from my huge eye.

After the students had found the spikes and repaired the track I again started off with them. This time the students in charge would not let me run so fast. By the light of my huge eye they kept watching ahead to see if there was anything wrong. Their vigilance certainly won my greatest admiration! We had not run for more than half an hour when they discovered some more rails missing.

I stopped again and the students got off to search for the missing rails. But this time, search as they might, they could not find them. After having thoroughly discussed the matter they decided to use the rails from behind to repair the break in front.

Immediately this group of emergency railway workers got busy. Some took up the rails from behind, some transported them, some laid them in place, while others spiked them. The clank of their hammers mingled harmoniously with their chant "Hi yo, hi yo!" as they worked, and after a while they began again to sing the song *The Road Builders.*

. . . . . .

Hills tumble down.

The path is open,
Let's set to work;
With our chests thrown out
Let us march on together.

We are the pioneers building a road;
We will open the road for others.
Boom! Boom! Boom!
Ha, ha, ha. . . . Boom!

Finally came the dawn and the snowstorm abated. In a cold, silvery world and under the pale blue light of early morning, these emergency railway workers toiled so energetically and with such determination that none

of them could even be seen to blink. Looking at them I wanted to say:

"So long as you can repair the railway all obstacles in your path will fall like autumn leaves. I assure you that I will take you to your destination even if it should be the end of the earth. There may be more than one place where you want to go. I am at your service and will take you wherever you wish, wherever the rails may lead."

They seemed to understand what I said and replied with their song:

We are the pioneers building a road;
We will open the road for others.
Boom! Boom! Boom!
Ha, ha, ha. . . . Boom!

1936

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